

January 15, 2014

Dear Member of Congress,

I'm writing to you to ask that you add your name as a cosponsor to the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act (H.R. 1518/S.1406). Over the years, Elvis and I owned several Tennessee walking horses, and I know them to be gentle, graceful creatures. Today, 43 years after the passage of the federal Horse Protection Act (HPA) that was intended to end the terrible practice of 'soring', these horses continue to suffer at the hands of abusive trainers. Congress must pass the PAST Act to end this torture of show horses and ensure that the practice of soring them is no longer merely regulated and that it is, in fact, ended.

A campaign of misinformation is being waged by a small segment of this industry that has a cultural and financial interest in keeping the stacked and chained, chemically and mechanically sored show horse in competitions around the country. I am one of those individuals who have said "enough!" and I want to share with you some of my reasons.

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is charged with enforcement of the HPA, but as the result of a 1976 amendment to the Act, the agency has for decades certified horse industry organizations to conduct the majority of inspections at horse shows. This self-regulation scheme has failed miserably and must be abolished – a conclusion reached by USDA's own Office of Inspector General in a 2010 audit of the program. USDA inspectors are threatened by exhibitors at horse shows and must frequently be accompanied by security personnel; exhibitors regularly load up their horses and leave the show grounds when USDA inspectors arrive unannounced at competitions; and USDA inspectors find that many more violations are cited when they are present at shows than when the industry inspectors are left to their own devices.

Opponents of the bill insist that cruelty in this faction of the industry is perpetrated by only a "few bad apples. You may be aware of the recent successful felony prosecution of well known Hall of Fame and Celebration world grand champion rider and trainer Jackie McConnell for conspiracy to violate the HPA, and the state of Tennessee's prosecution of him for cruelty to horses in his care. An undercover investigation revealed what was going on in his Tennessee training facility. When it aired on ABC's [Nightline](#) it shocked the nation and the world.

Last month, another Tennessee trainer, Larry Wheelon, an industry horse show judge and the chairman of the Walking Horse Trainers' Association's Ethics Committee, was indicted in Tennessee on 15 felony counts of aggravated animal abuse and conspiracy. Local investigators for the Blount County, TN SPCA said that they had never seen horses in such agony as those that were removed from Mr. Wheelon's facility. The only reason trainers put horses in such agony is to prepare them for horse show competition. The stacks, weighted shoes and action devices used on these horses are all part of the soring process - paraphernalia that contribute to the unnaturally gaited show Walking horse.

Both McConnell and Wheelon were multiple violators of the Horse Protection Act over their careers. The industry knew what they were doing, and turned a blind eye. According to USDA records, the current president of the Walking Horse Trainers Association has 17 HPA violations on record; the seven members of his board of directors share at least 112 such

violations. He claimed he had no idea that Wheelon had ever received tickets for violating the HPA.

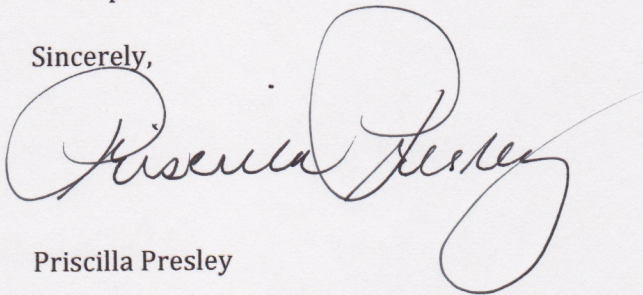
What both of these men have in common with every other trainer that has an HPA violation history is that what they were doing is standard practice in the industry. Only when it becomes public knowledge do industry officials claim they are "shocked".

I find it incredible that this industry faction, which has proven after 40 years that it lacks both the will and interest in stopping these horrible practices, is treated with credibility by people (including some members of Congress) who seem to think that the economic issues surrounding the horse are more important than the abuse of the horse itself, the suffering creatures on whose backs the money is made.

The show horses, the treatment of which is being addressed by the PAST Act, represent approximately 5-10% of the horses found within the breeds impacted. The other 90-95% of those horses will still be used and loved and cared for. They will still require the feeding and services that they do now, and will continue to make an economic impact by virtue of their very existence. A segment of this larger group is already being shown on alternative show circuits that have turned away from these abhorrent practices. That is an outlet for the use for these horses that is expected to grow and thrive. The breeds themselves will benefit when the reputation for show horse abuse that follows them wherever they go is removed.

All of these arguments, however, pale when faced with the one argument that is most compelling: abusing an animal for economic gain, entertainment or gratification of ego is morally and legally wrong. When we see a wrong that we have the ability to correct, people like me and the legislators who represent us have an obligation to make that correction. The PAST Act is the correction for this longstanding problem. It has bipartisan support in the House and Senate; what it needs now is your cosponsorship to make soring horses a thing of the past.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Priscilla Presley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Priscilla Presley